**HOME**

**Warsan Shire**

no one leaves home unless  
home is the mouth of a shark  
you only run for the border  
when you see the whole city running as well

your neighbors running faster than you  
breath bloody in their throats  
the boy you went to school with  
who kissed you dizzy behind the old tin factory  
is holding a gun bigger than his body  
you only leave home  
when home won’t let you stay.

no one leaves home unless home chases you  
fire under feet  
hot blood in your belly  
it’s not something you ever thought of doing  
until the blade burnt threats into  
your neck  
and even then you carried the anthem under  
your breath  
only tearing up your passport in an airport toilets  
sobbing as each mouthful of paper  
made it clear that you wouldn’t be going back.

you have to understand,  
that no one puts their children in a boat  
unless the water is safer than the land  
no one burns their palms  
under trains  
beneath carriages  
no one spends days and nights in the stomach of a truck  
feeding on newspaper unless the miles travelled  
means something more than journey.  
no one crawls under fences  
no one wants to be beaten  
pitied

no one chooses refugee camps  
or strip searches where your  
body is left aching  
or prison,  
because prison is safer  
than a city of fire  
and one prison guard  
in the night  
is better than a truckload  
of men who look like your father  
no one could take it  
no one could stomach it  
no one skin would be tough enough

the  
go home blacks  
refugees  
dirty immigrants  
asylum seekers  
sucking our country dry  
niggers with their hands out  
they smell strange  
savage  
messed up their country and now they want  
to mess ours up  
how do the words  
the dirty looks  
roll off your backs  
maybe because the blow is softer  
than a limb torn off

or the words are more tender  
than fourteen men between  
your legs  
or the insults are easier  
to swallow  
than rubble  
than bone  
than your child body  
in pieces.  
i want to go home,  
but home is the mouth of a shark  
home is the barrel of the gun  
and no one would leave home  
unless home chased you to the shore  
unless home told you  
to quicken your legs  
leave your clothes behind  
crawl through the desert  
wade through the oceans  
drown  
save  
be hunger  
beg  
forget pride  
your survival is more important

no one leaves home until home is a sweaty voice in your ear  
saying-  
leave,  
run away from me now  
i dont know what i’ve become  
but i know that anywhere  
is safer than here

**TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN (TELL ME LIES ABOUT VIETNAM)**

**Adrian Mitchell**

I was run over by the truth one day.  
Ever since the accident I’ve walked this way  
    So stick my legs in plaster  
    Tell me lies about Vietnam.  
  
Heard the alarm clock screaming with pain,  
Couldn’t find myself so I went back to sleep again  
    So fill my ears with silver  
    Stick my legs in plaster  
    Tell me lies about Vietnam.  
  
Every time I shut my eyes all I see is flames.  
Made a marble phone book and I carved all the names  
    So coat my eyes with butter  
    Fill my ears with silver  
    Stick my legs in plaster  
    Tell me lies about Vietnam.  
  
I smell something burning, hope it’s just my brains.  
They’re only dropping peppermints and daisy-chains  
    So stuff my nose with garlic  
    Coat my eyes with butter  
    Fill my ears with silver  
    Stick my legs in plaster  
    Tell me lies about Vietnam.  
  
Where were you at the time of the crime?  
Down by the Cenotaph drinking slime  
    So chain my tongue with whisky  
    Stuff my nose with garlic  
    Coat my eyes with butter  
    Fill my ears with silver  
    Stick my legs in plaster  
    Tell me lies about Vietnam.  
  
You put your bombers in, you put your conscience out,  
You take the human being and you twist it all about  
    So scrub my skin with women  
    Chain my tongue with whisky  
    Stuff my nose with garlic  
    Coat my eyes with butter  
    Fill my ears with silver  
    Stick my legs in plaster  
    Tell me lies, tell me lies about Aghanistan.  
    Tell me lies about Israel.  
    Tell me lies about Congo.  
    Tell me, tell me lies Mr Bush.  
    Tell me lies Mr B-B-Blair, Brown, Blair-Brown.  
    Tell me lies about Vietnam.

**STILL I RISE**

**Maya Angelou**

You may write me down in history  
With your bitter, twisted lies,  
You may tread me in the very dirt  
But still, like dust, I'll rise.  
  
Does my sassiness upset you?   
Why are you beset with gloom?   
'Cause I walk like I've got oil wells  
Pumping in my living room.  
  
Just like moons and like suns,  
With the certainty of tides,  
Just like hopes springing high,  
Still I'll rise.  
  
Did you want to see me broken?   
Bowed head and lowered eyes?   
Shoulders falling down like teardrops.  
Weakened by my soulful cries.  
  
Does my haughtiness offend you?   
Don't you take it awful hard  
'Cause I laugh like I've got gold mines  
Diggin' in my own back yard.  
  
You may shoot me with your words,  
You may cut me with your eyes,  
You may kill me with your hatefulness,  
But still, like air, I'll rise.  
  
Does my sexiness upset you?   
Does it come as a surprise  
That I dance like I've got diamonds  
At the meeting of my thighs?   
  
Out of the huts of history's shame  
I rise  
Up from a past that's rooted in pain  
I rise  
I'm a black ocean, leaping and wide,  
Welling and swelling I bear in the tide.  
Leaving behind nights of terror and fear  
I rise  
Into a daybreak that's wondrously clear  
I rise  
Bringing the gifts that my ancestors gave,  
I am the dream and the hope of the slave.  
I rise  
I rise  
I rise.

**Barbie Doll**

***Marge Piercy***

This girlchild was born as usual  
and presented dolls that did pee-pee  
and miniature GE stoves and irons  
and wee lipsticks the color of cherry candy.  
Then in the magic of puberty, a classmate said:  
You have a great big nose and fat legs.   
  
She was healthy, tested intelligent,  
possessed strong arms and back,  
abundant sexual drive and manual dexterity.  
She went to and fro apologizing.  
Everyone saw a fat nose on thick legs.   
  
She was advised to play coy,  
exhorted to come on hearty,  
exercise, diet, smile and wheedle.  
Her good nature wore out  
like a fan belt.  
So she cut off her nose and her legs  
and offered them up.   
  
In the casket displayed on satin she lay  
with the undertaker's cosmetics painted on,  
a turned-up putty nose,  
dressed in a pink and white nightie.  
Doesn't she look pretty? everyone said.  
Consummation at last.  
To every woman a happy ending.

**WHITE COMEDY**

**Benjamin Zephaniah**

I waz whitemailed  
By a white witch,  
Wid white magic  
An white lies,  
Branded by a white sheep  
I slaved as a whitesmith  
Near a white spot  
Where I suffered whitewater fever.  
Whitelisted as a whiteleg  
I waz in de white book  
As a master of white art,  
It waz like white death.   
  
People called me white jack  
Some hailed me as a white wog,  
So I joined de white watch  
Trained as a white guard  
Lived off the white economy.  
Caught and beaten by de whiteshirts  
I waz condemned to a white mass,  
Don't worry,  
I shall be writing to de Black House.

**TIANAMEN**

**James Fenton**  
  
Tianamen  
Is broad and clean  
And you can’t tell  
Where the dead have been  
And you can’t tell  
What happened then  
And you can’t speak  
Of Tianamen.

You must not speak.  
You must not think.  
You must not dip  
Your brush in ink.  
You must not say  
What happened then,  
What happened there.  
What happened there  
In Tiananmen.  
  
The cruel men  
Are old and deaf  
Ready to kill  
But short of breath  
And they will die  
Like other men  
And they’ll lie in state  
In Tianamen.  
  
They lie in state.  
They lie in style.  
Another lie’s  
Thrown on the pile,  
Thrown on the pile  
By the cruel men  
To cleanse the blood  
From Tianamen.  
  
Truth is a secret.  
Keep it dark.  
Keep it dark.  
In our heart of hearts.  
Keep it dark  
Till you know when  
Truth may return  
To Tiananmen.  
  
Tiananmen  
Is broad and clean  
And you can’t tell  
Where the dead have been  
And you can’t tell  
When they’ll come again.  
They’ll come again  
To Tiananmen.

# NATIVITY: FOR TWO SALVADORAN WOMEN, 1968-87

# Demetria Martínez

Your eyes, large as Canada, welcome  
this stranger.  
We meet in a Juárez train station  
where you sat for hours,  
your offspring blooming in you  
like cactus fruit,  
dresses stained where breasts leak,  
panties in purses tagged  
"Hecho en El Salvador,"  
your belts like equators,  
mark north from south,  
borders I cannot cross,  
for I am an American reporter,  
pen and notebook, the tools  
of my tribe, distance us,  
though in any other era I might  
press a stethoscope to your wounds,  
hear the symphony of the unborn,  
finger forth infants to light,  
wipe afterbirth, cut cords.  
  
It is impossible to raise a child  
in that country.  
  
Sisters, I am no saint. Just a woman  
who happens to be a reporter,  
a reporter who happens   
to be a woman,  
squat in forest, peeing  
on pine needles,  
watching you vomit morning sickness,  
a sickness infinite as the war in El Salvador,  
a sickness my pen and notebook will not ease,  
tell me, ¿Por qué están aquí?  
How did you cross over?  
In my country we sing of a baby in a manger,  
finance death squads,  
how to write of this shame,  
of the children you chose to save?  
  
It is impossible to raise a child  
in that country.  
  
A North American reporter,  
I smile, you tell me you are due  
in December, we nod,  
knowing what women know.  
I shut my notebook,  
watch your car rock  
through the Gila,  
a canoe hanging over the windshield  
like the beak of an eagle,  
babies turning in your wombs,  
summoned to Belén to be born.